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A TRIP TO THOMPSON'S LAKE.

BY DR. W. S. STRODE, BERNADOTTE, ILL.



FOR many years it has been my custom to make hunting trips to Thompson's Lake, on the Illinois River. These excursions were usually made during the fall or spring, for the purpose of duck shooting.

In the spring of '87, I had concluded to change the programme and postpone my visit to this region till about the 10th of June, then to make a collecting instead of a shooting expedition.

At four o'clock, on the morning of the above date, accompanied by two companions (Green and Herriford) a start was made for this lake—distant sixteen miles as the crow flies. These individuals were not collectors ; but volunteered to accompany me, just to "have a good time and see the fun," as they styled it.

The morning was beautiful, and in two hours from the time of leaving the village of Bernadotte, my team of quick steppers had carried us to the little city of Lewiston, within four miles of our destination.

Stopping here a half-hour, we replenished our larder by the addition of some minced beef, bologna and canned fruits, and filling a keg with water, we again merrily resumed our journey, arriving at Prickett's Fishing, on the west side of the lake at 9 a. m.

Thompson's Lake is a beautiful sheet of water, lying about a half-

mile from the Illinois river, which is its outlet at the upper or north end, while the classical "Spoon River" drains it from the lower or southern extremity.

At low water the lake is about five miles long by one and a quarter wide. At the south end there is a dense growth of flag, covering a space of a thousand or more acres. This place in suitable seasons was said to be the nesting site of great numbers of the American Coot *Fulica americana*.

The investigation of this marsh was therefore the main object of my visit at this time. To accomplish this a boat was indispensable, and we at once set about procuring one. This was no difficult task for the fishermen near by had a score of them to let at twenty-five cents a day.

And indeed an antiquated specimen of the genus "Elm Peeler" whom I had known many years, coming forward just at this time, offered me a boat for all day if I would just dish him out some quinine. "For," said he, "the old gal and six of the young uns have been shakin' powerfully with the ager." It is needless to say that he got the quinine.

Inquiring of him if there was any "mud-hens" in the flag this season, he replied: "Yes, jest sca'ds of them." Noticing my gun, a quizzical expression came over his face, and shutting one eye he ejected about a half-pint of tobacco juice upon a duck that was waddling around a few feet away, and remarked: "Soy Doc. what yer goin' to shoot those pesky things for—why, a dog wouldn't eat them."

Without stopping to explain to him the object of our visit, we loaded ourselves and accouterments in a boat and set sail for the home of the coots, at the lower end of the lake, distant about two and a half miles. Green, who was handling the oars, at once set about telling some big fish stories while Herriotord, who had been a river man all his life, interluded the "whoppers" by an occasional boating song.

A half-mile down our course we came to a low island of two or three acres, covered with a stunted growth of half-dead willow. Pulling on my waders, I went ashore and found the island occupied by a colony of a few hundred Bi-color Blackbirds—almost every willow containing one of their true basket nests. Young birds everywhere in every stage of growth.

Finding two or three nests containing eggs that appeared nearly fresh, I took them as mementoes of the trip, and as the first eggs

found. Also found and secured several sets of Kingbirds' eggs; the complement being three or four. With these I returned to the boat, glad to escape the harsh and almost deafening noise made by the male Red-wings.

A mile further down, Herriford was put ashore to search along the edge of the lake to see what he could find.

Patches and stretches of flag now began to appear, and as we moved along an occasional coot would spring out and fly towards the center of the lake. As we neared our destination they became more numerous, and joining each other, formed little flocks out in the lake—keeping just out of range of my gun. Wishing to procure one or two for skins, I kept a sharp lookout for a shot, which presently came by Herriford flushing one from the reeds near the shore. As it rose on the wing, at a distance of fifty yards, I let it have a charge of No. 4's and it dropped. But I had aimed better than I had anticipated, for another coot, sitting in the water a little further on, also fell dead and H. who happened to be just in range, was also besprinkled with shot; but the charge, having spent its force, did him no harm.

Securing the dead coots, I now commenced searching for their nests, wading into the flag, which came up to my shoulders. I soon came to nests, and the first one found contained eight beautifully speckled eggs. A few yards away, another nest contained six, and close by, another contained four, and in fact, nests were on every side. My exclamations of delight so excited Herriford, that without waiting to remove boots or breeches he rushed into the sedgy lake and was soon rewarded for his temerity by catching a toe in the thick moss that grew at the bottom, and fell headlong into the water, here about two feet deep. But nothing daunted by this ducking, he blew the water from his nose and mouth, and was soon helping me fill the basket, which I carried, with eggs. There was no trouble to find nests. They were everywhere, many containing incomplete sets. These we did not molest, for I had projected another visit to this place in about a week or ten days: but this visit was never made, professional business preventing. We soon gathered all the eggs that I wished, as I did not care to act the part of the "Great American Egg Hog."

The eggs of each set were carefully given a set mark before being deposited in the basket. They were then carried to the boat, when Green packed them with oats in boxes, to be blown after returning home. Many of the nests were in water two feet deep, and yet could

scarcely be called floating nests ; for the plan of the birds in building seemed to be to select a thick bunch of flag and then to deposit debris and moss on this, till by its weight it would sink to the bottom. The building would then be continued until a structure was raised a foot or more above the water. This would be slightly hollowed to contain the eggs. Not a single coot was found on a nest, nor in the immediate vicinity of one, which fact seemed to confirm the assertion of Bingley and other naturalists, "that the coots only incubate during the night time," leaving their eggs to the warmth of the sun during the day. While wandering about in the flag several Least Bitterns flew up, and making an awkward flight of a few rods, would again pitch down out of sight. Marking the site where one disappeared, I went to the boat, got my gun and returned. Flushing the bird, it dropped as the gun cracked, and I had another desirable skin to add to my collection. Thinking there must be some nests somewhere about, Herriford and I turned our attention to searching for them and were soon rewarded by finding a nest apiece, built in the flag a foot or so above the water. One nest contained three and the other four bluish-white eggs. We also found several nests of the Long-billed Marsh Wren ; but unluckily none contained eggs.

Being thoroughly tired, hot and hungry, and for the time being our greed for eggs satiated, we embarked for camp and dinner.

After dinner we started to explore the shore of the lake, which was thickly fringed with a dense growth of water willow, standing in and out of the water, a perfect paradise for the Prothonotary Warbler and Tree Sparrow, and they were here in immense numbers, almost every hole containing a nest of one or the other ; but unfortunately we found we were a little too late, for almost every nest contained young birds. We succeeded in collecting only two or three sets, each well advanced in incubation.

Seeing a Downy Woodpecker come out of a hole about twenty feet up in a very dead willow snag, I put on my climbers and went up as far as the tree would bear my weight. With a sharp hatchet I now cut through the trunk, and was carefully lowering it to Herriford, on the ground. A limb that I was holding it by suddenly gave way and it fell, striking him on the head and shoulder, felling him to the earth as completely as though he had been rapped by a policeman's billy. The Downy's eggs of course were broken, as was also a set of six Tree Swallow's that were in a hole a little higher up.

A little back from the shore I discovered a very pretty nest of the Warbling Vireo, well out on a limb of a small pecan tree, and about ten or twelve feet from the ground. Herriford, wishing to distinguish himself, insisted on climbing to it ; but as I suspected would be the case, his proverbial bad luck again came to the front. As he was astraddle of the limb, carefully working his 200 lbs. out towards the nest it suddenly gave way and he came down on the run, head first into the pond, utterly demolishing the nest and eggs of course. Subsequently I found another nest and secured four very pretty eggs.

The Crested Flycatcher was very abundant here, making some portions of the woods almost hideous with their harsh notes : secured several good sets of their eggs ; but the majority of their nesting sites were in some old snag that was either dangerous or difficult to climb.

Found seven sets of Cuckoo eggs, all yellow-billed except one. All sets of three except one, which was a remarkable set of seven. I judged from the appearance of the eggs that they were the product of two birds. We also secured two sets of four each of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, two sets five and one set six of the Baltimore Oriole, one set three and one set four of the Yellow Warbler. Found many nests of the House Wren ; but took the eggs from one nest only – a set of eight beautiful, zone-marked eggs.

Night coming on, we returned to camp and prepared and ate a hearty supper. We had intended to stay over night and collect another day ; but after sizing up our days work, decided that we had eggs enough.

A thunder-storm was forming in the west, and every indication pointed towards a night of it, and after a council we resolved to make a moonlight drive home.

Hastily packing up, we drove rapidly across the prairie bottom, and as we reached the top of the bluff that overlooked the lake, we halted to take a farewell look at the beautiful sight that lay behind us.

The lake reflected the light of the full moon like a piece of burnished silver. The winding Illinois just beyond ; the belts and fringes of trees. The “quawk” of the Great Blue Heron, as he lazily flew across the low prairie ; the notes of the “Thunder Pumper” in the swamps ; the ghoulish, unearthly, laughing tones of a pair of Barred Owls, and the distant thunder and vivid lightning of the gathering storm in the west, all combined to produce an effect not easily effaced from the mind of one “loving nature in all her moods.”

Suffice it to say, that we were thoroughly drenched before reaching home. It didn't rain ; just simply poured ; but notwithstanding this, we were content and thoroughly satisfied with our days work.

To be sure Herriford felt somewhat sore, or like Pete Jones, "all shuck up like," yet it was all in the interest of science, and therefore did not count.

Returning to this lake in June, '88, I found the breeding grounds of the coots covered with eight feet of water, and not a single bird of this species to be found anywhere in the lake region.

THE YELLOW-WINGED SPARROW.

Coturniculus passerinus.

BY LYNDY JONES, GRINNELL, IOWA.

In the recollection of my earliest ornithological efforts, Yellow-winged Sparrow bears a prominent part. Then, when the country was quite new, and one might roam unhindered for miles, the short, native prairie grass afforded a much better nesting place than does the close-cropped blue-grass of to-day.

When the prairies were emerging from the native to the present state, by the breaking up and seeding down of large tracts, they were at their usefulness to the sparrows. These fields, unpastured during the first year, abounded with sparrows, especially the Yellow-wing, whose nests, made almost wholly of grass and sunken an inch or more into the ground, could be found on hillsides, hilltops or in the bottom-lands. Early in the season the nests were prettily arched over ; but later this artistic flourish was omitted, and the time thus occupied was spent in depositing the eggs.

Prior to this period, the thistles, scattered here and there over the land, were much resorted to as nesting sites. Almost every alternate thistle afforded protection to the nest and eggs of Yellow-wing. Now the birds are fewer and never resort to the thistles ; why, I do not know. The low-lands seem to be their favorite nesting-places, though occasionally a nest is found on the hillside and even hilltop. Strange as it may seem they have almost abandoned such neglected fields as